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Committee on Information
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Agenda item 10
Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its seventieth session

Draft report

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Chapter III
General debate

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States: South Africa (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Ecuador (on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), Guatemala (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations and subsequently in its national capacity), Egypt, Morocco, the Russian Federation, El Salvador, the United States of America, Argentina, Japan, China, India, Burkina Faso, Portugal, Pakistan, Belarus, Colombia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Cuba, Ukraine, Senegal, Nigeria, Mexico, Israel, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Libya, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Brazil, Costa Rica and the United Republic of Tanzania. The Committee also heard statements by the following observers: the European Union, the State of Palestine and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

2. The general debate was preceded by statements by the outgoing Chair of the Committee, Lyutha Al-Mughairy, and the newly elected Chair, Kaha Imnadze. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information also made a statement and responded to questions and comments.

3. Paraguay submitted an application to become a member of the Committee and was welcomed by the Chair as an observer for 2015.

4. In considering the substantive issues before the Committee, representatives highlighted the integral role that the United Nations, as the world's only universal multilateral organization, played in global affairs, including in the important areas of peace, security, the promotion and protection of human rights and sustainable

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development. They stressed, therefore, that the function of the Department of Public Information as the primary voice of and means of dissemination of information about the United Nations to the world was of utmost importance. Representatives pointed out that the Organization's workload was constantly expanding as it strove to tackle new emergencies and ongoing issues. That meant that the need for the Department to reach a global audience in local languages on a wide range of issues was also growing. Representatives, recognizing that the Department faced a challenging task in fostering a better understanding of the work and objectives of the United Nations, commended it on its work to cover such a wide variety of issues that were of great importance and interest to the international community.

5. Many representatives expressed their full support for the Department in its work in disseminating the ideals and values of the United Nations and information on the work of the Organization through its continued campaigns on issues of importance to the international community, including the post-2015 development agenda, decolonization, peacekeeping, disarmament, human rights, sustainable development, poverty eradication and climate change. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, pointed out that 2015 was a landmark year in the history of the United Nations in which significant decisions would be taken, including the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, and encouraged the Department to continue to help to increase awareness and understanding of those issues.

6. Many representatives focused on multilingualism in the work of the Department, including the use of the six official languages across social and new media platforms. One, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the Department's efforts to mainstream multilingualism into all communication and information activities, noting that multilingualism was a priority because it was essential for communicating the actions of the United Nations to people around the world and was key to achieving accountability, transparency, ownership and sustainability in relation to those actions. Multilingualism was also vital in an effective multilateral system and the extraordinary language diversity of United Nations staff could be an asset in fulfilling the Department's mandate effectively.

7. Another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, also emphasized the importance of linguistic parity in reaching as broad an audience as possible, including to garner support for the work of the Organization globally. He noted that issues such as peace, security, development, HIV/AIDS, the Millennium Development Goals, the post-2015 development agenda and dialogue among civilizations were of concern to people worldwide, meaning that there was a need to communicate information in all official languages to raise awareness of those subjects. He commended the Department's important role in efforts to combat the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, a sentiment that was echoed by several other representatives. Several representatives voiced concern about the fact that daily press releases were not issued in all official languages, a situation that made it difficult to follow the work of United Nations bodies in a timely fashion and contributed to inaccessibility and a lack of transparency.

8. While most representatives acknowledged that there was a need for multilingualism to be mainstreamed in the work of the Organization, many also called for that work to be accomplished in a cost-neutral manner, using existing resources. One noted that language included in the draft resolution discussed at the

sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly had resulted in an unexpected request for additional budgetary resources of $13.8 million to expand multilingualism, expressing the hope that that situation would not be repeated.

9. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, pointed out that in developing countries traditional media remained the primary vehicles for the dissemination of information on the Organization's work. He encouraged the establishment of broader contacts with media outlets in developing countries to expand the Department's reach. Several other representatives echoed that sentiment, with one, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noting that there continued to be a digital divide between developed and developing countries.

10. All representatives who spoke praised the work of the United Nations information centres as the voice of the Organization to the world. The network of centres played a vital role in mobilizing support for the work of the Organization and served as an important link between people and the policies and activities undertaken by the United Nations by facilitating knowledge about the work of the Organization. The centres also were instrumental in building and maintaining the credibility and relevance of the Organization because they provided important information in local languages to local audiences. One representative noted that the centres, especially in developing countries, played a significant role not only in disseminating information about the United Nations, but also in enhancing its image among populations. The centres were a vital source of information for local populations and key contributors to raising public awareness of internationally agreed goals contained in General Assembly resolutions. It was therefore important to strengthen their capacity by allocating adequate financial resources to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The establishment of an information centre in the Republic of Korea was proposed.

11. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, emphasized the importance of disseminating information and promoting the "World against Violence and Extremism" initiative and the culture of dialogue among civilizations across the world through various means, including seminars.

12. Several representatives voiced concern over the potential for the politicization of public information and the possible inappropriate use of information and communications technology to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign States and destabilize countries and regions. Several representatives also raised the issue of modern communications technology being used to infringe citizens' right to privacy in contravention of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. One representative noted that that technology should be used to promote peace, sustainable development, cooperation, solidarity and human rights.

13. A number of representatives applauded the Department's commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. One pointed out that the publicity surrounding the anniversary afforded an opportunity for the Organization to promote its work more extensively and comprehensively and raise the awareness of the international community of the many areas that it covered. Another suggested that the anniversary was an occasion for Member States to highlight the work of the Organization, listing activities undertaken by his country to that end, including concerts, symposiums, conferences and commemorative

ceremonies. A third representative said that the anniversary was an opportunity to reflect on the record of the United Nations and assess the challenges ahead.

14. Numerous representatives praised the work of the United Nations Academic Impact, noting that it was, with its focus on disseminating information about the Organization to university students worldwide, a successful example of the Department's global outreach. Representatives also expressed appreciation for its efforts to strengthen and expand those partnerships with institutions of higher learning and increase the number of schools in its global network.

15. A number of representatives expressed strong support for the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine, noting that it helped to raise awareness of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. A few representatives also commended the Department on its training programme for Palestinian journalists.

16. Several representatives commended the work of the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, observing that it reflected the growing importance of youth-related activities in the outreach of the Department and the emphasis that the Department placed on the education and empowerment of young people to face contemporary challenges. One representative stressed the importance of strengthening the voices of young people as a way of combating violent extremism and suggested that the Department could contribute to the process by promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and mutual respect in its youth programmes. Another representative noted that 2015 marked the twentieth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

17. A number of representatives commended the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in particular its efforts to digitize files and to make the guide to the United Nations available in the official languages.

18. Responding to comments and queries, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information emphasized the Department's commitment to multilingualism, saying that it was factored into all planning and decision-making to ensure that the Department reached as broad an audience as possible. Both social media and traditional means of communication were integral to ensuring that all members of the global family could hear about and be part of the work of the United Nations. She stressed the importance of the staff of the United Nations information centres, who were at the very front line in reaching out across the digital divide and furthering the multilingual agenda to which the Organization was committed. In addition, she noted the digitization by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library of 300,000 documents containing some 3 million pages, accessible online in all official languages, in addition to the 100,000 documents digitized by the United Nations Office at Geneva Library. An estimated 17 million documents remained to be digitized, of which 4 million, considered of particular importance, were the current focus of the digitization project.